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Bradin Cormack. *A Power to Do Justice: Jurisdiction, English Literature, and the Rise of Common Law, 1509-1625.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. 406 pp. $35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-226-11624-2.

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In this brilliant book, Bradin Cormack permanently reconfigures our understanding of the early modern literary imagination, showing that it was involved in legal culture to a degree not previously realized. Specifically, he demonstrates that literary works were one of the cultural arenas in which new and contested forms of jurisdiction over people and territory were negotiated. He amply supports his claim that "[a] century of English literature has been more intimately engaged with technical aspects of law than has been understood" (p. 4). In doing so, he challenges the prevailing new historicist view of the period's literature as primarily engaged in the interplay of discipline, punishment, and sovereignty, subversion and containment. He also argues importantly for literature not only as a force against law, but as a force within and shaping it. This vision of literature and law as mutually constitutive is the study of law and literature at its most fruitful and sophisticated. The chapters present a series of brilliant re-readings of major literary works from this standpoint.

Cormack covers a time when English law consisted of numerous, at times competing, jurisdictions–not just secular and church courts, but manorial, admiralty, assizes, municipal courts, piepowder courts, and many others. This diversity was coming under pressure in this period, however, from increasing bureaucratic centralization and the spreading hegemony of the common law. This tension, Cormack argues, and the jurisdictional crises of the period–encounters with the alien law of Ireland, the role of French law in England, and the uncertain jurisdictional law of the sea–made apparent in law an instability of meaning commonly associated with literary texts, and Cormack shows how literature engaged with this instability and participated in the shaping of the evolving legal order.

The book opens with an analysis of John Skelton's *Magnyfycence* (c. 1519-1520) not along traditional lines as a critique of excessive royal expenditure, but rather as an analysis of royal identity in the context of the expanding Tudor bureaucracy. This bureaucratization of the king's authority necessarily distanced manifestations of that authority–such as writs–from the king's immediate presence, and Cormack shows how the play participates in the construction of this new kind of authority. Chapter 2 continues the theme of centralization in the works of Thomas More, examining More's commitment to jurisdictional heterogeneity in his refusal to affirm the Act of Succession and in *Utopia* (1516).

Chapters 3 and 4 move into the Elizabethan period, specifically, Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queen* (1590-96) and Shakespeare's history plays, and examine the tension between competing territorial jurisdictions–Ireland, France–and what Cormack calls "an ever more … nationalistic common law" (p. 40). The final chapters turn to Shakespeare's Jacobean plays *Pericles* (1609) and *Cymbeline* (c. 1610), and then to the latest of the works treated, John Webster, William Rowley, and John Heywood's *Care for a Cuckold* (1624). Shakespeare's two tragicomedies, Cormack shows, reflect the fact that the idea of jurisdiction had come under new pressure from the Scottish union of 1603 and the evolving notion of England as a supranational authority. He argues that the plays address the problem of negotiating jurisdiction through the notion of thresholds between spaces and nations. Indeed, Cormack sees these plays as participating in the construction of "an emergent language of international power as a language of metaphysics of relation"

(p. 228). In the figure of Posthumous, the exiled merchant of *Cymbeline*, the play asks jurisdictional questions which Cormack brilliantly links with contemporary legal cases, in particular the case of the *Post Nati* (*Calvin's Case*) (1608), a case addressing jurisdictional questions arising from the Scottish union. Both play and cases ask whether "allegiance and fidelity ... transcend distance" and whether "the servant remain[s] bound to the master across distance" (p. 243). Both the merchant Posthumous in the play and the *post-natus* in the legal battle are "instruments[s] for the extension of the royal body across distance" (p. 254). In *Pericles*, Cormack reads the sea, a crucial driver of the play's plot, as resisting jurisdictional claims, a place untouched by the "categories that territorial law requires to make sense of the world" (p. 288), and yet in doing so, creating the potential for a new, potent kind of sovereignty based on a belonging "separate from place and ownership" (p. 290).

Finally, the book turns from the transnational to the local, and concludes with a chapter on John Webster, William Rowley, and John Heywood's less well-known urban comedy *Care for a Cuckold*. The play's main plot turns on the efforts of a sailor returned from four years at sea to insist that his wife's obviously illegitimate child, conceived and born in his absence, is his, partly by using the language of different legal jurisdictions to give himself the name of "father"–absurd in one jurisdiction (the ecclesiastical one, which had jurisdiction over most family matters) but logical in another (for example, that of property, in which his wife's possessions are his). In doing so successfully, Cormack argues, the protagonist resists the "proposition that we are the law's subjects" (p. 329) and instead shows that the law, pushed "to the limits of its competence" (p. 329) offers room for participation and creativity.

Small quibbles, with respect to the book's interdisciplinary endeavor, and ones hardly unique to this book: for law and literature studies to be more accessible to legal academics, footnotes and bibliographies are infinitely preferable to endnotes alone. Anyone trained in law expects to have sources immediately visible in close proximity to the text and is endlessly frustrated to have to remember page numbers and note numbers, hold one place in the book, and thumb through the end pages to find the source–which, as likely as not, will refer obliquely to yet another endnote, several pages earlier, and so on. And Cormack's central observation that jurisdiction is a crucial category which orders the heterogeneous practice of law would hardly surprise a civil procedure professor, or for that matter, any legal practitioner. Nor is the idea of different forms of jurisdiction–over places, people or issues–an idea whose evolution in this period Cormack masterfully delineates–novel to lawyers used to diversity, subject matter, *in rem*, and *quasi in rem* jurisdiction. In fact, an aspect of this book which should not be neglected is its wonderful, denaturalizing history of the development of these jurisdictional concepts legal scholars take for granted today.

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